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Unveiling Success Beyond the Passing Rate: An Appreciate Inquiry on the Effective Study Habits, Motivational Factors, and Learning Strategies of High-Achieving Criminology Licensure Examination Passers in the Philippine Context

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the study strategies employed by high-achieving passers of the Criminology Licensure Examination, revealing prevalent patterns, optimal practices, and the personal and institutional elements that facilitated their success. A qualitative research design was implemented at one of the criminology institutions in region 10, Northern Mindanao, based on the Appreciative Inquiry 4Ds Model. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and related documents, and seven top-performing CLE examinees were purposively sampled. Findings revealed interconnected themes such as (1) strategic self-discipline for academic excellence, (2) aspirations rooted in service and family commitment, (3) purposeful preparation supported by sustainable practices, (4) and a strong desire to guide and inspire future examinees. The study concludes that examinees' self-regulated learning methodologies and the caliber of institutional support systems offered by criminology programs interact dynamically to shape high licensure success. It is recommended that criminology programs improve structured review systems, mentorship opportunities, and well-being programs to help future students be more prepared and succeed in the long run.

Keywords: Academic Motivation; Commendation Award; Institutional Support; Licensure Preparation; Self-Regulated Learning; Study Habits.

1. Introduction

The Criminology Licensure Examination (CLE) is an important step for criminology graduates in the Philippines who want to work in the field. The Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) runs the CLE under Republic Act No. 11131. It makes sure that only people who meet the necessary intellectual and moral requirements can get a license to practice (Dela Cruz & Ramos, 2021). The CLE is more than just a regulatory body; it also serves as a quality assurance tool that affects how criminology programs construct their curricula and teach their students (Mendoza & Bautista, 2020). The test evaluates competence in criminal law, investigation, law enforcement, and penology, functioning as both a professional gateway and a certification of academic readiness (Dunn & Dunn, 2020).

Related studies emphasizes that success in professional license examinations is significantly linked to cognitive methods, motivating attitudes, and self-regulated learning (SRL). Research indicates that robust self-regulation, sophisticated cognitive techniques, and elevated academic motivation are major predictors of examination achievement (Panadero et al., 2023; Theobald, 2021). According to expectancy-value theory, students' views about their talents and the perceived worth of assignments affect how well they do (Eccles & Wigfield, 2022). Empirical studies underscore the efficacy of retrieval practice and deep learning strategies in improving long-term retention and performance in high-stakes tests (Weinstein et al., 2020; Baeten et al., 2020). Collaborative learning and digital learning tools also help students do better in school and be more interested in their work (Zheng et al., 2020; Bond et al., 2021).

In the Philippine context, numerous research has investigated the predictors of performance in the CLE. Dela Cruz and Ramos (2021) discovered that high-achieving examinees frequently employed mock examinations, concept

mapping, and case study as fundamental preparation techniques. Likewise, Mendoza and Bautista (2020) indicated that organized review programs, academic mentorship, and institutional backing markedly improved examinees' preparedness and success rates. These results indicate that personal discipline and institutional measures are both crucial for criminology graduates to succeed in getting their licenses.

International research corroborates these findings. Johnson and Reynolds (2020), in their examination of law enforcement license candidates in the United States, identified a significant correlation between self-testing, distributed practice, and enhanced performance. Smith and Jones (2020) found that exam anxiety was a major problem for criminal justice students in Canada. They suggested that planned study regimens and peer-assisted learning could help reduce stress and enhance results. These national and international research collectively underscore the significance of strategic preparation, active learning methodologies, and psychological readiness in the performance of licensure examinations.

Even while there is more and more information on academic success and licensing tests, there are still some big holes. A significant portion of the literature emphasizes broad determinants of board test performance or quantitative correlations, while qualitative investigations into the actual experiences of high-achieving CLE passes remain few. There is a lack of context-specific examination about the interplay between cognitive strategies—such as time management, goal-setting, and metacognitive regulation—and institutional supports, like review centers and faculty mentoring.

Moreover, whereas previous research delineates patterns and efficacious methods, they frequently neglect the intricate human narratives and integrative processes that characterize outstanding performance. To fill this vacuum, this study aims to offer detailed qualitative insights into the study methodologies and experiential pathways of high-achieving CLE passers, thereby providing contextually relevant knowledge to enhance criminology education and license preparation programs.

1.1. Study Objectives

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1) What study strategies and practice have high-achieving criminology examinees found most effective during their board exam preparation?
2) How do these high achievers envision an ideal study approach on learning environment that support success?
3) What actionable methods, routines or systems did they implement to ensure consistent academic performance?
4) How do they intend to sustain and share their successful strategies to inspire future criminology examination?

2. Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research approach to examine the lived experiences and study strategies of high-achieving candidates of the Criminology Licensure Examination (CLE). Qualitative inquiry is suitable for comprehending how individuals perceive and derive meaning from their experiences within a specific environment (Creswell, 2013). The study utilized the Appreciative Inquiry paradigm developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva

(1987), adopting a strengths-based viewpoint that focused on achievements, best practices, and facilitating factors instead of shortcomings. This method was in line with the goal of finding effective ways to prepare for the CLE that led to outstanding achievement and giving helpful advice to future test-takers and teachers.

The study was carried out at one of the higher education institutions in region 10, Northern Mindanao, Philippines, esteemed for its robust Criminology department and its regular output of high-achieving CLE passes. The school has planned academic support systems, such as faculty mentoring, enrichment programs, and organized review programs, that help students get ready for the licensure exam. Seven (7) high-achieving CLE passes were chosen using purposive sampling. During their oath-taking ceremony, PCAP Region 10 gave the Commendation Award to participants who got a general average of 87% or higher on the July–August 2024 CLE. The Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) provided an official list of passers, which was used to find eligible participants. Faculty referrals and alumni networks were also used. Final involvement was based on data saturation to make sure that all perspectives were taken into account.

Data were collected via a researcher-created semi-structured interview guide of open-ended questions aimed at eliciting comprehensive and reflective comments to participants' preparatory experiences. Experts in criminology education and qualitative research validated the instrument's content to make sure it was clear, relevant, and in line with the study's goals. To make the guide even better, a pilot interview was done with two competent CLE passes who were not part of the final sample. Changes were made based on feedback to make the tool better at getting rich, useful data.

Data collection began following the acquisition of approval from the institutional ethics committee and the attainment of informed consent from all participants. Interviews took place in calm, private places, either in person or through virtual platforms like Zoom or Google Meet, depending on what worked best for the participants. With permission, audio recordings of the sessions were made, and field notes were added to record nonverbal clues and observations on the setting. Transcripts were made word for word, and participants were contacted for clarification as needed to make sure the data was correct and trustworthy. The study followed Republic Act No. 10173's strict rules for keeping information private, including giving participants pseudonyms and securely storing their data.

The 4D model of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, 2005) was used to look at the data. This paradigm has four steps: Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny. During the Discover phase, coding revealed common themes concerning strengths, study habits, motivational variables, and institutional support. The Dream phase looked into what participants hoped for and what they thought would be the ideal ways for future CLE test-takers to do things. In the Design phase, emerging ideas were synthesized into actionable strategies and practical models of exam preparation. Finally, the Destiny phase was all on keeping good practices going and coming up with suggestions for criminology education and programs that help people get their licenses. This methodical analytical approach guaranteed a cohesive and strengths-based assessment of the participants' success experiences.

3. Results and Discussion

The seven participants in this study are all high-achieving Criminology Licensure Examination (CLE) passers from region 10. They are all between the ages of 24 and 27 and all received the prestigious Commendation Award from

PCAP Region 10. This award is only given to examinees who get a general average of 87% or higher, which puts them among the best performers in the July–August 2024 CLE. These individuals graduated from well-known criminology schools in region 10 and are motivated by a strong sense of duty to their families, the community, and their future careers as law enforcement officers.

The examination of the seven high-achieving CLE passers identified four major themes that define their study strategies and motivations: Strategic Self-Discipline for Academic Excellence, Aspirations Rooted in Service and Family Commitment, Purposeful Preparation Supported by Sustainable Practices, and Commitment to Guide and Inspire Future Examinees These themes show the main ways that the best students got ready for and took the Criminology Licensure Examination. The next sections include a full report on the results and discussions on these issues.

Strategic Self-Discipline for Academic Excellence

This study shows that high-achieving examiners on the Criminology Licensure Examination say that their success is due to deliberate self-discipline, which includes focused study habits, consistent routines, and disciplined time management. Faced with the pressures of a high-stakes professional exam, participants purposefully controlled their focus, reduced distractions, and followed structured study plans.

In line with self-regulated learning theory (Zimmerman, 2002; Panadero, 2017; Cleary & Zimmerman, 2019), these behaviors show that the person is planning ahead, controlling their effort, and keeping an eye on their performance. Previous studies also indicate that structured study habits and enduring self-discipline are strong predictors of academic success (Salpocial & Palma, 2023; Li et al., 2025; Santos et al., 2024).

These are the responses of the participants:

“My strength is studying and repeatedly reviewing my materials. I discipline myself not to get distracted.” (P1)

“When I studied, I focused only on studying. I ignored things that could ruin my mental focus.” (P2)

“Once I start studying, I don’t talk to others for hours. I make sure to focus first.” (P3)

“I didn’t let myself get distracted; I chose to stay focused.” (P4)

“Even when I didn’t feel like studying, I still pushed myself.” (P3)

“Time management… I made a schedule for everything I did.” (P2)

“I strictly followed my daily routine—I studied in the morning, answered mock tests in the afternoon, and reviewed at night.” (P5)

Participants' response exhibit robust inhibitory control, effort regulation, and sustained attention— fundamental components of self-regulated learning. By purposefully eliminating distractions and consistently revisiting subjects, examinees enhanced deep processing and retention. Their continuous routines lessened their dependence on changing motivation and helped them stay strong during times of rigorous review. Empirical data substantiates these approaches, demonstrating that structured study habits, efficient time management, and reduced distractions

improve engagement and academic achievement (Tao, Hanif, & Wang, 2025; Lourenço & Paiva, 2024; Luwiha et al., 2025).

In general, people who did well on the CLE didn't just rely on their natural brilliance; they also prepared carefully, organized, and for a long time. Strategic self-discipline became a key way for test-takers to get the most out of their cognitive work, avoid putting things off, and keep making progress throughout their review process.

Aspirations Rooted in Service and Family Commitment among Criminology Examinees

This study also shows that the people who took the CLE were very motivated by their civic duty and family obligation. Their motivation transcended individual success, embodying ambitions to benefit the community and enhance their families' welfare. In line with other research (Nobis Jr., 2025; Aroy et al., 2024; Silosilo & Maldepeña, 2025), criminology students frequently seek licensing as a means to facilitate public service employment and familial progression. These value-driven goals served as psychological anchors that facilitated tenacity during arduous training.

These are the responses of the participants:

“Ma’am, I really want to become a law enforcer in the future.” (P2)

“My dream is really to serve the people and become a law enforcer someday.” (P3)

“I really want to become part of the police force. That has been my dream since I was a child.” (P4)

“Everything I’m doing is for my parents. I want to repay their sacrifices.” (P1)

“My greatest motivation is my desire to help my mother and father.” (P2)

The participants' desire to join organizations like the Philippine National Police, Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, and Bureau of Fire Protection shows that they care about their civic duties and morals. These results are consistent with research that underscores service orientation and integrity as fundamental motivators in criminology education (Mallillin & Caday, 2023; IJRIAS, 2023).

Family obligation also plays a big role. Participants perceived the successful completion of the licensure exams as a gesture of gratitude and recompense for parental sacrifices. Studies show that having strong family obligation beliefs makes people more persistent, self-efficacious, and engaged in schoolwork (Glover, Bámaca, & Homma, 2025; Liu et al., 2022). Parental support also makes people more resilient when they face scholastic obstacles (Contreras, 2024). Thus, intrinsic service motivation combined with family-centered aspirations significantly reinforced examinees’ determination to succeed.

Purposeful Preparation and Sustainable Practice toward Academic Destiny

Beyond discipline and motivation, this study shows that high-achieving test-takers matched smart preparation with activities that promote long-term health. Participants underscored the significance of early review, summary, collaborative learning, practice tests, and appropriate rest as essential components of their success. Research confirms that organized goal planning, metacognitive monitoring, and strategic study habits improve long-term academic achievement (Simón-Grábalos et al., 2025; Dignath et al., 2021; Zimmerman, 2022).

These are the responses of the participants:

“My strategy is reading and rereading my study materials while making sure I understand everything.” (P1)

“I created a study schedule, and sometimes I study with my friends.” (P2)

“I started my review early. I summarized my lessons and used different learning materials.” (P3)

“You need to balance study and rest.” (P4)

“It would be good if review centers provided mental health sessions.” (P7)

The participants responses show’s that they are preparing ahead, working together to make sense of things, and managing their stress on purpose. Adding breaks, practice tests, and scheduled timetables helped people feel less overwhelmed and more confident when studying. Research shows that balanced routines, stress-management techniques, and well-organized study sessions help people remember things better, feel less anxious, and be more ready for tests (Hofmann et al., 2021; Jayawardena et al., 2022; Bouwmans et al., 2021).

Barry Zimmerman's Self-Regulated Learning Theory offers a robust explanatory framework for these findings. The examinees' goal setting, strategic planning, persistent effort, and reflective monitoring correspond directly with the cyclical model of foresight, performance, and self-reflection in self-regulated learning (SRL). Their preparation demonstrates not passive studying but proactive academic agency, underscoring the notion that success in licensure is influenced by intentional and enduring learning practices.

Guiding and Inspiring Others toward Professional Growth

This study shows that high-achieving examinees see their achievement as a way to help and motivate future CLE candidates. Their readiness to share solutions, offer support, and exemplify endurance demonstrates a robust professional identity and a sense of civic obligation. Studies show that mentorship improves academic involvement, resilience, and self-efficacy (Kachaturoff et al., 2025; Guo et al., 2024).

These are the responses of the participants:

“Right now, I’m teaching Criminology students to share my knowledge and strategies.” (P1)

“I plan to share my study notes and strategies with the next batch.” (P4)

“I want to inspire others to never give up.” (P2)

“Even average students can succeed with perseverance.” (P7)

Participants' mentorship initiatives enhanced both cognitive and motivational growth among peers. Research indicates that peer and near-peer mentoring enhance engagement, sense of belonging, and academic perseverance (Dos Reis & Yu, 2023; Opazo et al., 2024). By promoting resilience and demonstrating disciplined preparation, these examinees enhance a culture of collective academic advancement within the criminology community.

Overall, the findings revealed that success is not solely dependent on cognitive preparation but is significantly influenced by personal beliefs, civic goals, and familial obligations. These incentives serve as psychological anchors that maintain discipline, resilience, and enduring commitment during the test process. Strengthening

service-oriented training and providing family-inclusive support mechanisms may further boost examinees' academic persistence and professional preparation.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that dedicated, persistent, and well-organized study habits are the main reasons why people do well on the Criminology Licensure Examination. The results show that strategic self-regulation, good time management, and targeted review routines are the most important factors in getting a license. Examinees who deliberately arranged their calendars, reduced distractions, and adhered to regular learning routines were more adept at maximizing cognitive effort and ensuring steady academic advancement over the review period.

Also, strong personal reasons, including wanting to serve the public and being very committed to family, can help you stick with it amid tough training. The desire to work for the Philippine National Police and other public safety agencies strengthens the feeling of purpose of those taking the exam, while goals that focus on family make them more resilient and keep them interested. These value-based motives go beyond personal success and tie license preparation to bigger social and relational responsibilities.

5. Future Recommendations

From the findings and conclusions, it is recommended that:

1) Criminology students and future CLE examinees may develop disciplined and consistent study routines supported by repeated review, focused sessions, and active learning. They may also maintain sustainable preparation through balanced schedules, rest, stress management, and mock exams. Seeking guidance from mentors, joining peer study groups, and using personalized reviewers and practice tests are recommended to strengthen comprehension and readiness.

2) Faculty members may incorporate study skills training, self-regulation strategies, and test-taking techniques into teaching. They should also provide structured review activities, reinforce core criminology concepts early, and create opportunities for collaborative learning among students.

3) Program administrators may develop/enhance mentoring programs involving top-performing graduates, enhance academic advising and stress-management services, and coordinate with review centers to provide mock tests and essential review materials for CLE preparation.

4) Review centers are may offer balanced programs that combine academic drills with mental health support and time management guidance. Providing organized handouts, mock exams, and early dissemination of review materials is essential to improve examinees' preparation.

5) Future studies may investigate the effectiveness of specific study strategies and mentoring programs on CLE performance and conduct comparative research among different groups of examinees to deepen understanding of examination preparation patterns.

Declarations

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare no competing interests.

Consent for publication

The authors declare that they consented to the publication of this study.

Authors' contributions

All the authors conceptualized the study, conducted the interviews, performed data analysis, and prepared the manuscript.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Availability of Data and Material

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the appropriate institutional ethics committee.

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Declaration of Artificial Intelligence

No AI tools were used in the preparation or writing of this manuscript.

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